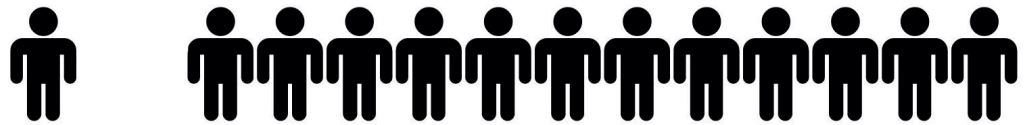


Unlocking potential

The isolation of young people in custody



What is isolation?

Isolation involves keeping a young person who is in custody away from others, usually against their will. This means they can't do other things like socialise, get an education or exercise.

- There are currently around 1,000 young people in custody in England and Wales.
- This is fewer than in recent years, which shows that progress is being made against the requirement that custody should only be used as a last resort. This is what the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)* says is important.
- But our research shows that **TOO MANY** young people are being placed in isolation, and for **TOO LONG**.

Does isolation take into account young people's needs and help them make positive changes to their life, while they are in and when they leave custody?

No.

The UNCRC also says this is important.

The restricted access to normal activities and socialising can have a serious effect on young people who are often already vulnerable.

Young people describe the experience of being in isolation and bringing on feelings of...

Boredom
Stress**Anxiety**
Depression **Anger** **Apathy**
Hopelessness

One in three

On average, the number of young people in custody who experience isolation

More than once

For those who do, isolation is usually a repeated experience

8 days

The average episode of isolation in Young Offender Institutions

They might then be less able to reintegrate into society after they are released, or even get into trouble with the law again. This is a waste of young people's potential, and also a waste of public money.

The effect of isolation on young people varies depending on...

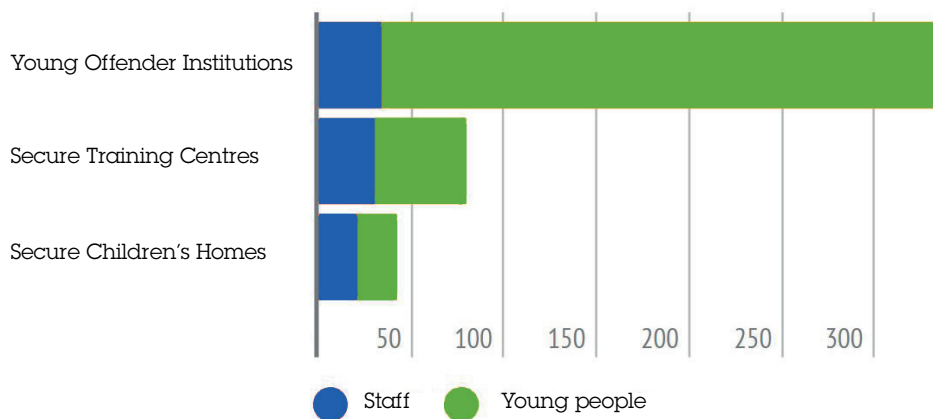
- how often they are put in isolation
- how long they are kept in isolation
- the type of isolation, for example whether they can still take part in some normal activities and socialising.

The youth justice system has three types of establishment: Young Offender Institutions, Secure Training Centres and Secure Children's Homes.

More than two thirds of young people in custody are in Young Offender Institutions.

Young Offender Institutions are much larger and have fewer staff to look after many more young people.

This graph shows the maximum size of each type of establishment, and the proportion of staff to young people in each.



Young people's experiences of being in isolation are often worse in Young Offender Institutions, compared with other types of establishment.

Some young people from certain groups such as those of Black and mixed heritage, those who have been in care, and those with a disability are isolated more often than others. Further research is needed to find out why.



Increased likelihood of experiencing isolation in custody

300%

Black or mixed heritage

67%

Those with a disability

63%

Those who have been in care

42%

Assessed as being at risk of self-harm

What does the Children's Commissioner recommend?

- Young people should only be placed in isolation;
 - as a last resort
 - not very often
 - not for a long time.
- Every time a young person is placed in isolation, it should be recorded.
- More work is needed to find out why young people from particular groups are more likely to experience isolation in custody.
- Opportunities for young people in isolation – such as socialising, education and exercise – should continue when it's safe to do so.
- Youth justice establishments should review their sanctions and rewards to make sure that they encourage positive behaviour and achievements.



* The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an agreement between countries which sets out 42 basic rights all children and young people should have. You can find out more about the UNCRC on our website: www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/about-us/childrens-rights-and-uncrc

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